



The Old Stone Wall

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State of New Hampshire, Department of Cultural Resources
Division of Historical Resources

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EXPLORING THE ROLFE BARN

The Rolfe Barn looks like a large but ordinary New Hampshire barn until we step inside. As our eyes adjust to the darkness of this almost windowless structure, the eighteenth century begins to appear.

The first thing we notice is the size of the building. When we climb to the hayloft and look down the 85-foot-long axis of the barn, the immensity of the structure and the regular repetition of its framing members impress the mind with their powerful geometry.

Then we notice the scale of the great pine frame. Each of the twenty-six wall posts of the building is huge. The front and rear wall plates, tenoned to the tops of the posts, are made up of two solid timbers, each more than forty feet long, pinned together at scarf joints at the center of the building. In the manner of the best buildings of the seacoast, each member of the frame has been smoothed with an adze after being squared with a broad axe. But this is a barn, not a merchant's dwelling. Such care in finishing the frame represents an expenditure of time and money. This investment proclaims the Rolfe family's determination to remain rooted in the soil of Penacook and to bequeath a staunch legacy to the generations to come.

Then we notice the pervasive evidence of the sawmill. All the sheathing boards are sawn on a reciprocating or "up-and-down" water-powered mill, as are the diagonal braces. This is typical of an eighteenth-century building. But the girts that link the posts at the hayloft



*The Rolfe Barn, Penacook (Concord), New Hampshire
(courtesy photograph)*

level are also sawn, as are the purlins to which the roof boards are nailed, and the diagonal wind braces that keep the roof from racking in the wind. This is not typical. Then we remember that a sawmill had stood at the present-day village of Penacook, about a mile from the Rolfe barn, since 1760, processing the ancient stands of pine that grew thickly along the banks of the Contoocook River.

The eye adapts quickly to the dark interior, but the mind adjusts more slowly. It takes time to comprehend the absolute symmetry of the great frame on each side of a central axis. It eventually becomes clear that this building was planned as a matched pair of barn frames of the type that New Englanders knew in the eighteenth century. This cavernous building is contrived so that the two mirror-image frames reach out and link across a central bay, becoming one structure of immense capacity. Each half of the building is an example of the type of structure known as an English barn. The typical English barn is a rectangular structure, with its doors on the long sides. A central driveway passes

(continued on page three)

The View from the Solarium

In the late 1700's, Nathaniel Rolfe built a double English barn in the Village of Penacook, New Hampshire, of exceptional proportion and craftsmanship. My first encounter with the Rolfe barn was in the late summer of 2001, on a site visit to the old Rolfe homestead, which sits next to the Rolfe barn and which is the oldest building in the village.

As anyone would be, I was struck by the barn's size and its exceptional condition. There was also something threatening about the situation. The barn sat almost directly in front of a newly built house on a small lot. The barn appeared to have no rational value or use for its owner. It was out of proportion to everything around it. I think everyone on the site that day sensed danger and vulnerability for this marvelous structure.

A year later the stunning word came that the barn was to be demolished, transported across the country, and incorporated into a private building project - an historic

(continued on page three)



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The DHR is a state agency, supported by the State of New Hampshire, by the federal Historic Preservation Fund (through a matching grant administered by the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior), and by donated funds and services. In addition to its state functions, the DHR is also responsible for administering the federal preservation program in New Hampshire.

Recent State Listings to the National Register of Historic Places



Carpenter & Bean Block, Manchester, NH. Listed December 13, 2002. (photograph by Lynne Emerson Monroe)

The Carpenter and Bean Block at the corner of Elm and Dow in Manchester was built in 1883 by Nehemiah Bean and Josiah Carpenter, two of the city's most prominent citizens at the time. The initial structure was joined in the 1890s by an addition to the north. The building's designer was Col. J.T. Fanning, a well-known architect and engineer with many Manchester commissions to his credit. In addition to Manchester's municipal water system, Fanning designed numerous civic, commercial, industrial, residential, and engineering structures in Manchester and eastern New England. The Carpenter and Bean Block is significant as an example of vernacular Italianate style and as a commission of Col. J.T. Fanning. A certified rehabilitation for affordable apartments, sponsored by Manchester Neighborhood Housing Services, has recently been completed on the building.



Smith & Dow Block, Manchester, NH. Listed December 13, 2002. (photograph by Lynne Emerson Monroe)

The Smith and Dow Block, built in 1892, is a well-known landmark on Elm Street in Manchester. Its massive semi-circular entries and rounded projecting bays distinguish it from other apartment buildings in the area. The building, a fine example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style, was

designed by William M. Butterfield and constructed as an investment property for Gov. John Butler Smith and Frederick C. Dow. Butterfield was a prolific architect whose commissions included 500 buildings throughout New England by 1895. At the turn of the 20th century, he had become Manchester's foremost architect. The building's design expresses Richardsonian qualities in its massing, volume, and scale; use of brick and sandstone, and heavy round-arched entries. The recent certified rehabilitation of the Smith and Dow Block by Manchester Neighborhood Housing Services has returned its architectural prominence and provided a substantial number of new affordable apartments.



Troy Village Historic District, Troy, NH. Listed December 13, 2002. (photograph by Lynne Emerson Monroe)

Troy Village in New Hampshire's Monadnock Region has been recognized for significance in Community Planning and Development. This large district (approximately 177 acres) encompasses Troy Village, the geographic, civic, commercial, and population center of the town. The district incorporates a range of property types and periods of construction spanning the community's early settlement to the mid-20th century. The designation was the initiative of the Troy Heritage Commission, which undertook an ambitious fund-raising effort to document over 200 properties. In addition to the importance of National Register recognition, the project has developed architectural and historical information on the district which will be extremely useful in the future.

Christine E. Fonda
National Register Coordinator

The View from the Solarium (continued)

trophy for a person with the means to acquire it. Later we were to learn that several preemptive business transactions had been made, circumventing the community's demolition review ordinance, and apparently sealing the barn's fate.

This story is a familiar one in New Hampshire, yet it vividly reminds us of the need for communities to take their own preemptive measures to protect their historic treasures.

Many options exist to do this, and more need to be created. Preservation easements offer caring owners of today the ability to protect a property for tomorrow. Listing of a property on the state or national register gives it special status and is a statement to all that this resource is important to the community, and to the nation.

The first order of business in every community should be the survey and identification of its historical resources. This is an area where the Division of Historical Resources can help in many ways, including certified local government (CLG) funds to support such surveys. All of us, both at the state and community level, should consider the annual listing and publication of our most endangered properties.

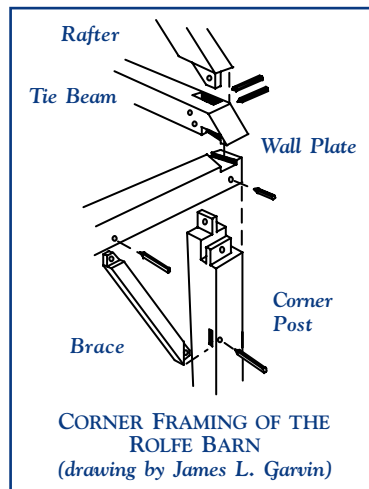
The story of the Rolfe barn is still being written, and efforts continue to save the barn and keep it in the community where it belongs. Hopefully this story will have a happy ending, with the Penacook Historical Society's plans for incorporating the barn and the Rolfe homestead into a new historical center becoming a reality. What we can do, with certainty, is let this story be a catalyst for strong preemptive preservation measures in all our communities.

James McConaha
Director, Division of Historical Resources
NH State Historic Preservation Officer

Exploring the Rolfe Barn (continued)

through the building from front to back. Haylofts or platforms create an upper level on each side of the driveway. Stables for horses and cattle are enclosed below the tons of insulating hay. Unlike later barns, eighteenth-century English barns have few windows and no ventilating cupolas on the roof.

It is finally clear what this building is. The Rolfe barn is a complex artifact passed down from the 1700s. It is a testament to faith in the future, made by a family more than two hundred years ago. It is that family's response to the bounty of the rich alluvial lands at the confluence of the Contoocook and Merrimack Rivers, built to provide twice the capacity for hay and livestock as the



average New Hampshire barn of the time. It is that family's investment of time and skill in felling the huge pines that had stood nearby for centuries, in hewing those trees into massive timbers, in rallying the community to raise the largest and heaviest frame yet seen on a Penacook farm, and in cladding the mighty skeleton in thousands of feet of boards sawn in the nearby mill. It is that family's careful stewardship of their inheritance, protecting the building from the decay or fire that claimed so many New England barns over the years.

The barn's form and fabric embody the three great themes of life of the eighteenth-century settler in the upper Merrimack Valley: the fertility of the soil, the wealth of the forests, and the power of water to run the machinery of a nascent industry. The barn stands mute, but its lineaments tell an eloquent story to the awakened eye.

James L. Garvin
State Architectural Historian



Welcome to Dr. Richard Betterly, new DHR staff member

(photograph by Richard A. Boisvert)

It is a real pleasure to welcome Dr. Richard D. Betterly to the Division of Historical Resources. Richard is our newest historian and will be assuming a number of responsibilities; his main assignment is Coordinator of Preservation Planning. Richard will be focusing on preservation planning at the local level, building expertise in heritage and historic district commissions and in local planning and development departments.

Richard has a doctorate in historic preservation from Middle Tennessee State University and a master's in history from Bloomsburg University, Pennsylvania. He has been on the faculty of the Savannah College of Art and Design and Southeast Missouri State University, teaching architectural history, historic preservation law, and studio courses on preservation technology and vernacular architecture.

He was Director of Operations for the Historic Savannah Foundation, a consultant with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and with the engineering and planning firm of McCormick, Taylor & Associates in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He served on the Gettysburg National Military Park Redevelopment Planning Team, the Custer Battlefield National Monument Advisory Board and as a production consultant and advisor to the A&E Network series America's Castles.

Lest you think Richard is just another stuffy historian, he drives a Jeep Wrangler to work, owns a Corvette for fair weather driving and is an unabashed Green Bay Packers fan. We are delighted to have him on our staff and invite one and all to give him a warm welcome and, if you are a Packers fan, please give him a call soon!

Commissioner's Corner

Cultural & Heritage Tourism

People everywhere have started to realize that cultural and heritage tourism is a key element in the visitor industry that needs to be used more effectively. ***We here in New Hampshire are looking at this on a local, regional and national level. We know people are interested in visiting heritage sites and going to cultural events and activities; we also know an ever-growing percentage of people choose their destination because of the cultural and heritage attractions that are available.***

The Commissioner's Cultural Tourism Roundtables, held four times a year around the state, were established to get the cultural community and the traditional visitor community working together and talking about identifying the opportunities. "You cannot find opportunities, you must create them." The Roundtables give people an opening to create a better understanding and to seize the opportunities they have in their own communities.

Cultural and heritage tourism is a key initiative for the Department of Cultural Resources. I attended a national conference on cultural and heritage tourism, and out of this came a series of regional meetings. We hosted the New England states here in New Hampshire. This was followed by a conference in Pittsburgh where I presented the New England report to the national group. As a result, now there are national, regional, statewide, and local conversations about cultural and heritage tourism that are continuing through list serves, conference calls, and meetings, and we are actively involved.

The cultural and heritage tourism does have a positive impact on our communities, and we need to focus on our opportunities here in New Hampshire. Good cultural and heritage tourism is about identifying, protecting and promoting who we are. What we do to help define a community adds value not just to the visitor but to the residents as well.

If you take a look at every community in the state of New Hampshire, they all have a library, and some more than one; most have a historical society; they all have historical buildings, and they all have some type of arts organization. Sometimes the building where they hold special events is the local library and sometimes it is a town hall. It could be readings and discussions with the humanities council, or the children's librarians working with the local artists. Our cultural assets are an integral part of our community's well being and that is at the core of cultural and heritage tourism. Discovering how people benefit from it and participate in it is the challenge and the opportunity.

The Roundtable discussions help us to open our eyes to what is in our own community, where the potential partnerships are, and how we can take advantage of it all. It is important to share this information with our own communities because if you believe in something and value it, you will identify it, you will protect it, and you will promote it!

We welcome you to join us for our next Cultural Tourism Roundtable that will be held on Thursday, March 20th at the Millyard Museum in Manchester from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. If you are interested in attending the Roundtable, please call our office at 603-271-2540.

Van McLeod
Commissioner

Curator's Report

This has been an active summer and fall for the State Curator, with close to three hundred works of art photographed and accessioned into State of New Hampshire collections.

Considerable work was done at the state correctional facilities in Laconia during November 2002, logging in art works produced in the "First Step" program during 2001-2002.

The First Step program is required for all Lakes Region facility residents, the majority of whom are first time offenders incarcerated for substance abuse. First Step is a rigorous sixty day, highly structured program that blends considerable physical exercise with classroom instruction.

First Step is designed to teach participants to take control and ownership of their lives. A number of the course instructors are former U.S. Marines, and many offenders wash out before the course ends. Completion of the program is a matter of pride, and successful course completion makes further personal betterment courses available.

Works of art in the collections of the New Hampshire State Library were also examined and photographed. During December 2002, photographs and prints at the State Supreme Court were recorded; additional work is scheduled.

Russell Bastedo
State Curator

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